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ABSTRACT

Greek speaking children with special educational needs are confronted with severely limited resources both in the United States and abroad. In New York City, Boston, Athens, and Cyprus, there is a paucity of educational personnel trained to work with this population. As a pilot survey conducted in the Unites States and abroad illustrates, along with a paucity of trained personnel in the area of Greek bilingual special education, there is a lack of evaluation and curriculum resources with which to identify and instruct Greek special education students. The general conditions of Greek bilingual special education both in the United States and in Greece and Cyprus are articulated by the author, along with recommendations for future action. (Author/SB)

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"SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GREEK BILINGUAL CHILD: GREECE, CYPRUS AND THE UNITED STATES"

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ABSTRACT

Greek-speaking children with special educational needs are confronted with severely limited resources both in the United States and abroad. In New York City, Boston, Athens and Cyprus, there is a paucity of educational personnel trained to work with exceptional Greek-speaking children. As a pilot survey conducted in the United States and abroad illustrates, along with a paucity of trained personnel in the area of Greek bilingual special education, there is a tremendous lack of evaluation and curriculum resources with which to identify and instruct Greek special education students. The general conditions of Greek bilingual special education both in the United States and in Greece and Cyprus are articulated by the author, along with recommendations for future action in this area.

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Greek children are members of a minority group which is severely underrepresented in the field of special education. The painful reality of a shortage of properly trained Greek bilingual-bicultural special education personnel and programs in New York City and Boston is mirrored by a similar paucity of personnel and programs in Greece and Cyprus. The rate of development of programs for exceptional children in Greece and Cyprus is hindered by forces of tradition in the educational system which have not yet acknowledged the real needs of exceptional children. In the United States, the problem is similar. Since the central public school administration does not recognize the need for providing special services to Greek bilingual children with exceptional needs, very little is actually being done.

Preliminary research gathered in Greece, Cyprus and in New York City and Chicago paint a dismal picture. Information was gathered on the state of special education in Cyprus during a recent five month UNESCO study. The research was gathered in collaboration with Mr. Christos Kombos, Inspector of Special Education in Cyprus. The areas of teacher-training and programming for the mentally retarded and maladjusted were focused upon. Some of the findings of the researcher revealed that there was a severe lack of properly trained personnel to teach the handicapped. Other recommendations included the introduction of mainstreaming to special educational opportunities be made available to the handicapped from ages 5-18. [1]

In Greece, Fulbright-sponsored research was gathered in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Athens. The research revealed, in part, the reluctant manner in which Greece's traditional educational institutions responded to the challenge of innovation. Greece's bureaucracy is riddled with forces which make it difficult to implement new programs based on new ideas. [2] One of the key areas of pedagogical concern in the United States which the educational institutions in both Greece and Cyprus underemphasize is the affective domain. The neglected area of emotional and psychological development extends to the paucity of psychological as well as special education services available to children in both countries.

In the U.S., specifically New York City and Boston, the respective central administrations of the public as well as parochial schools have been slow to act in affirming the needs of Greek-speaking students with handicapping conditions. This situation amounts to a continuation of the neglect pronounced in the two major mother countries of these children - who are largely recent emigres.

The key to the problem lies in the failure to take steps in identifying exceptional children of Greek ancestry and who have limited English proficiency. Since few diagnostic instruments have been developed in the Greek language, and few individuals have received preparation to identify or evaluate Greek-speaking children's exceptional characteristics, these children usually do not receive the kind of corrective teaching which can help them.

Athens, Greece

In Athens, according to an informal survey recently conducted by Dr. George Flouris, (visiting Professor of Education, The University of Crete) the public educational institution's response to students with special educational needs is just beginning to take shape. Although there are no laws mandating special services for exceptional children, legislation for such services is now being considered in Greece. During the last five years, an increasing number of school psychologists have been trained in Greece to offer diagnostic and prescriptive services for children with exceptionalities. However, at the present time there are no university programs specifically involved in training educational personnel to work with exceptional children or youth. There are a small number of private agencies in Athens which undertake certain activities to meet the needs of children with special needs, primarily agencies for the blind and deaf.[3]

Cyprus

In Cyprus, legislation was passed which mandates some form of services for the handicapped child. There has been appointed an Inspector of Special Education in Cyprus, as part of their centralized system of Greek Education. As noted earlier, Special Education in Cyprus is also in an embryonic stage of development. Dr. Joan Benevento, in a recent trip to Cyprus, gathered extensive research on

the condition of special education for Greek Cypriots in that country. Her fact-finding mission, sponsored by UNESCO, revealed, among other things, the need to provide University programs which could properly train special educators to train other teachers working with exceptional children. In addition, Dr. Benevento delineated the competencies and resources that special educators in Cyprus would need to master. Although at the time of this writing the UNESCO research report or Special Education in Cyprus was not yet released, it should be made available to the public in the near future. [4] Presently, an effort is being made at St. John's University to develop a graduate training program for Greek Cypriot teachers who wish to complete their Master of Science degree in Special Education with a concentration in Greek Bilingual Education. St. John's University is the only institution of higher education in the nation that has sought to meet the needs of Greek Bilingual Special Education.

New York City

In New York City, Bilingual Special Education headquarters are located at the New York City Board of Education in Brooklyn. Ms. Muriel Pagan is the Director of Special Education Programs for bilingual children. While a substantial segment of the 74,000 special education children in New York City are also of language-minority

background, very few are other than of Black or Hispanic background. Of that terribly small percentage of remaining language-minority children, including Italian, Chinese, Yiddish and so forth, a still smaller percentage appear to be of Greek descent.

In New York City, special education programming has been decentralized. The result is that the thirty-two New York City School Districts each have their own Committee on the Handicapped (COH). In addition, each COH controls a certain number of the five-hundred School-Based Support Teams (SBST). It is the responsibility of the COH to assess and evaluate children in their dominant language. However, New York City at this time does not appear to have a Greek-speaking psychologist who can assess children in their native language. This fact may be one reason why so few exceptional limited English proficient children of Greek-speaking background have been identified in New York City. Ms. Connie Lekas, Assistant Director of the Databank Management and Information System for Special Education, New York City Board of Education, notes that only <u>one</u> Greek child in the whole system was identified as needing bilingual special education services. This finding is based on a recent survey of special education classes conducted by the Board of Education. The survey, in brief, requested that certain information be provided by all the special education teachers. This information

included what language each student spoke at home, which language the child was fluent in, and whether a bilingual class was recommended.

Once enough bilingual special education children are identified, special classes must be set up and appropriate teachers hired. For example, a bilingual class for the "trainable mentally retard" (TMR) was recently set up for eight limited English proficient children who speak Yiddish. The New York City Board of Education had to provide a special class and teacher for this "small" language minority group.[5]

Although the problem of identification of Greek bilingual exceptional children in New York City remains intense, some steps have been taken in the area of curriculum development. Ms. Voula Lekas, during her internship in 1977 at Florida State University, began preparing a Greek translation of the New York City Board of Education's core curriculum for CRMD (retarded mental development) classes.[6] More recently, Ms. Connie Lekas translated into Greek the IEP (Instructional Educational Plan), for use by the appropriate personnel involved.

Boston

In Boston, and the surrounding region, a city which has been in the forefront of the movement for bilingual education, there exists a Greek bilingual special education class at both the elementary and

secondary levels. A Boston public school, the Matahunt School, there is one Greek special education resource room which services several children and a trained Greek bilingual special education resource room teacher. Also located in Boston is the Greek bilingual school psychologist, Dr. Dian Coulopoulos, who has been working with the Core Evaluation Team. Dr. Coulopoulos uses a battery of tests to assess and evaluate Greek bilingual children in their dominant language. Two tests sometimes used are the Greek translation of the Peabody (translated by Dr. Coulopoulos) and the WISC. These translated tests, however, have not been standardized for this population.

Dr. Coulopoulos also assists the team in developing IEP's in the Greek language. IEP's in Greek, for example, are used at West Roxbury High School for Greek-speaking bilingual special education students there. Dr. Coulopoulos stresses the importance of Greek language IEP's, since this affords Greek dominant parents the opportunity to participate and communicate in the process of educational prescription.[7]

Conclusion

It is evident that greater strides must be made to identify and service a Greek bilingual student with exceptional needs, both

in the U.S. and in Greece and Cyprus. Whether in the U.S. or abroad, the situation for the Greek-speaking child is similar. To begin, proper assessment and evaluation of Greek bilingual exceptional children requires evaluation personnel who are fluent in Greek and English and knowledgeable of both Greek and American cultural patterns. Many more bilingual/bicultural school psychologists are needed in order to assist in the evaluation of these children. These psychologists must be sensitive toward and aware of the child-rearing characteristics of the home culture as well. In addition, properly trained teacher-trainers and teachers to work in the field of Greek bilingual special education are needed. The problem in this area is the response of institutions of higher education to the needs of this relatively small population in the United States. Joint efforts by educators in the U.S. and in Greece and Cyprus who are concerned with meeting the needs of Greek special education are needed. It appears that there is a concurrent recognition to the problems of this target population both in the U.S. and abroad.

Finally, there is the problem of communicating with the parents of Greek children with excepticnalities. Greek parents are often "too proud" to admit that their child may have need of special education services. Greek parents, as Triandis [8]

notes, Greek-American parents, according to informed discussions with principals of Greek-American Parochial Schools in New York City, tend to look at participation in a special education class as most degrading to their child. Rather than send their child to a special education resource room for one hour per day, notes Ms. Lekas, these Greek parents would rather hire a private tutor to work with their child after school.

In Ancient Sparta, mentally and physically imperfect children were cast off the mountainside by their parents. Although such an extreme was certainly not the prevailing attitude even then, combatting negative Greek parental attitudes toward the special education needs of their children remains an important objective for educators working with Greek speaking children. In addition to proceeding with the development of Greek bilingual special education staff, curriculum and evaluation, a simultaneous effort to enlighten Greek or Greek-American parents about the nature and function of special education services also seems warranted.

NOTES

1. Personal communication with Dr. Joan Benevento, New York City, August 31, 1980.

2. See George Flouris, John Spiridakis and Theophilos Mantzanas "Career and Educational Aspirations of Children in Greece", manuscript, 1978.

3. Personal communication with Dr. George Flouris, New York City, September 5, 1980.

4. Personal communication with Dr. Joan Benevento, New York City, September 5, 1980.

5. Personal communication with Ms. Connie Lekas, New York City, September 6, 1980.

6. Voula Lekas, "CRMD Core Curriculum - Board of Education in Greek" manuscript, 1977.

7. Personal communication with Dr. Diane Coulopoulos, September 8, 1980.

8. Harry Triandis and Pola Triandis, "The Building of Nations", Psychology Today (March 1969): 31-35.